

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
PLANNING COMMISSION
Minutes of March 3, 2021
Planning Commission Meeting

In keeping with Governor Phil Scott's COVID-19 "stay at home" directive, the meeting was held remotely.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm by Chair Hill-Eubanks.

Roll Call: Present for the meeting were Commissioners Laura Hill-Eubanks, Ruth Ruttenberg, Nancy Peck and Chandra Blackmer. Aaron Rhodes was absent. Also present were Clerk Mitch Osiecki; Debbie Zuaro, Russ Barrett, Lydia Petty, Casey Cutkomp, Kim Caldwell and Bonnie Donahue representing the Conservation Commission and/or one of several sub-committees (Dog River Park Committee, Town Forest Stewardship Committee, Ridges and River Routes Committee); John Stevens, Select Board; Colin Bright, Development Review Board.

Public Participation: Introductions were made and guests were welcomed to the meeting.

Set/Adjust Agenda: None

Conservation Commission Updates: Debbie Zuaro made a brief presentation, highlighting top priorities of the Conservation Committee, including:

- Town-wide natural resources inventory;
- Support the work of the various sub-committees;
- Coordinate with Norwich University to support projects of mutual interest.

Dog River Park Committee Updates: Bonnie Donahue commented that a goal of the Dog River Park Committee is to explore the potential to leverage the park as a tool to educate the public about the importance of protecting the river corridor.

Others voiced support for this idea and hope to see Dog River Park evolve into an educational resource for a number of conservation efforts.

Northfield Ridges & River Routes Committee Updates: Lydia Petty discussed group priorities, including:

- Support efforts to expand trail access, particularly in the Town Forest;
- Develop informational kiosks at strategic locations;
- Pursue a VOREC grant;
- Explore options to develop a recreation path in Northfield Falls and along the Route 12 corridor to Northfield;
- Study feasibility of adding sidewalks in various locations.

Town Forest Stewardship Committee Updates: Russ reported that initiatives underway by the TFSC include:

- Develop relationship with Norwich University;
- Work on trails and develop a Master Plan (in collaboration with Berlin and Montpelier);
- Work to develop Educational Programming and Special Events;
- Forestry Management Plan.

Laura Hill-Eubanks discussed the natural resources inventory.

The question was raised whether more could be done to ensure that the Conservation Commission could play a role in ensuring that projects coming before the DRB for review are adequately scrutinized with respect to natural resources, particularly water quality.

ZA Osiecki commented that an agenda is published in advance of the DRB meeting each month. It will be no problem to share that agenda with the Conservation Commission so that they can decide whether there are matters of interest to the committee up for review.

Chandra Blackmer asked about grants that might be available to the community. Also commented that the state seems to be strongly supportive of projects focused on water quality.

Ruth Ruttenberg expressed concern that previous zoning updates resulted in the Town Forest being placed in a residential zoning district. She wonders if the TFSC might consider voicing support for a more appropriate zoning designation for the Town Forest.

John Sevens reported that VTrans is in the early stages of planning of the replacement of the Main Street bridge on Route 12. Replacement is expected to occur in about five years, but planning is underway now. John believes that thought should be given to various options for both rehabilitating or replacing the bridge and how automotive and pedestrian traffic will be affected during the project.

There is some concern that an attractive pedestrian detour will be the railroad bridge behind Kenyon's Hardware, which would constitute a serious safety hazard. Another likely pedestrian detour would be along the northern end of Wall Street. A concern here is that while Wall Street has a sidewalk, it is essentially at the same height as the roadway, with no obvious visual buffer from the roadway.

The Planning Commission thanked everyone for taking the time to meet.

Zoning Regulation Review:

Brief discussion of the CVRPC Review & Recommendations.

Discussion of the timeline for implementing updates to zoning bylaws.

The observation was raised that the zoning District Map available on the Town web site is labeled Draft Zoning District map. ZA Osiecki will see to having the word "Draft" removed.

Discussion of tools the Planning Commission might use to collaborate on edits to zoning bylaw documents. ZA Osiecki advised that two commonly used tools are Dropbox and Google Documents. Will prepare a brief list of Pros & Cons for PC to consider before the next meeting.

Approval of Minutes: Peck moved to approve minutes of February 3, 2021, with edit that the vote to approve minutes was 3-0 (Peck lost connection shortly before adjournment); Blackmer seconded.

Motion carried 4-0-0.

Next Regular Meeting: April 7, 2021 at 7:00pm.

Hill-Eubanks will share next steps as part of setting the agenda.

Adjournment: Peck moved to adjourn; Blackmer seconded. **Motion carried 4-0-0.**

Meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.